

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission  
Nomination Report  
Perseverance Hall Benevolent Mutual Aid Association Hall



Meeting Date: April 12, 2018

Property Address: 1644 N. Villere Street

Owner: Holy Aid and Comfort Spiritual Church  
1644 N Villere Street  
New Orleans, La 70116

Architect: Unknown

Construction Date: 1880

Significance: Cultural

## General History

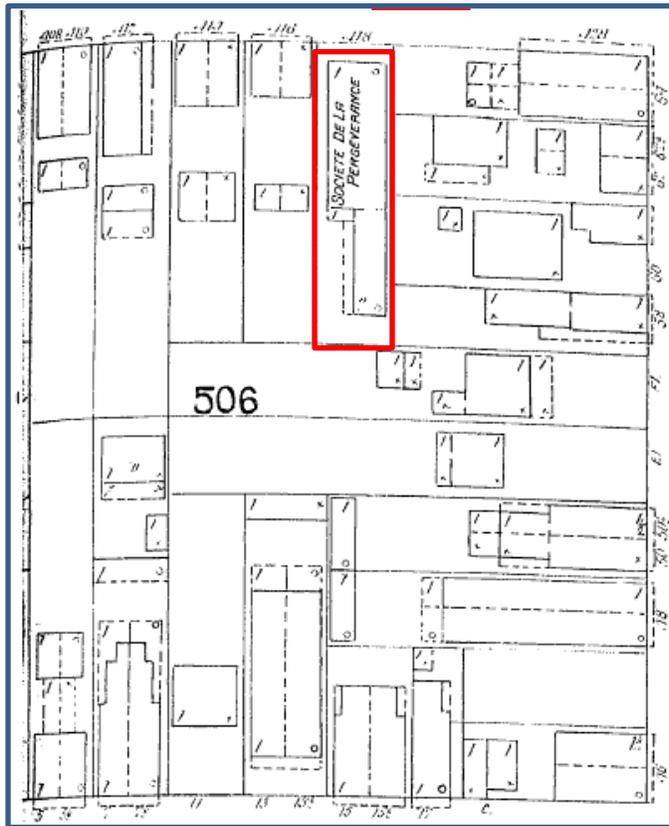


Figure 1. Sanborn Map, Vol.4, Sheet 134, 1893

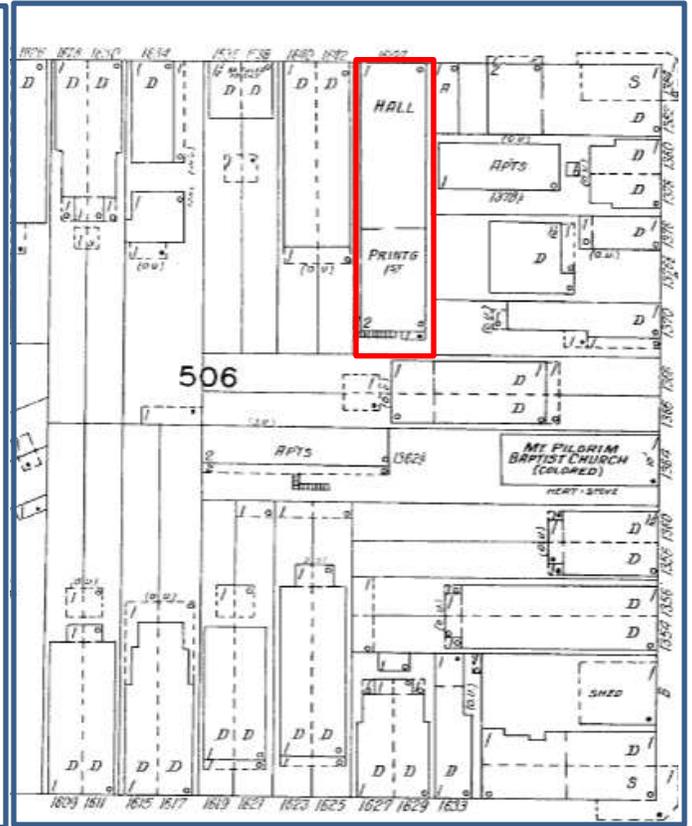


Figure 2. Sanborn Map, Vol. 1, Sheet 17, 1937

The building at 1644 N. Villere Street is a one story wood frame structure located in the New Marigny National Register Historic District. It was built circa 1880, as the association hall for the Societe De La Persévérance, or The Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Society, a benevolent society “founded by Creoles of Color.”<sup>1</sup> The Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Society was among the first of the benevolent aid society's to come in to existence; the society's stated purpose was to “cure the sick and bury the dead;” it worked much like an insurance company: members would pay monthly dues, and the society would look after members if they got sick, lost their jobs, or needed money for funerals.<sup>2</sup> While there was both an African American hospital and medical school, in the city, by the turn of the century, arguably the greatest provider of health care for black citizens, at that time, were the local benevolent societies; it's been

<sup>1</sup> (300 unique New Orleans moments: Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Association forms in March 1783 2017), (Blokker 2012, 98)

<sup>2</sup> (Knollenberg 2017), (300 unique New Orleans moments: Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Association forms in March 1783 2017)

estimated that four-fifths of New Orleanians belonged to such groups.<sup>3</sup> An editorial from the *Louisianian* in 1881 reported:

It is a notorious fact that the financial systems of many of these organizations are better, and more honestly conducted than many of the banking and state institutions. Their solvency for years, and their ability to meet their legal demands are sufficient evidence to bear out these statements. The manner in which the sick are cared for, and the respectable internments are given to their dead, are acts not only worthy of note, but of special pride to the city.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1. Perseverance Benevolent Society, June 1942**

In addition to helping people pay for health and funeral related expenses, the Society acted as a social organization, and hosted various events, such as “society banquets” where musicians would be invited to perform after dinner.<sup>5</sup> References to the hall pop up in multiple interviews with musicians that have been archived by the Hogan Jazz Archive.<sup>6</sup> Drummer, composer, and bandleader, Paul Barbarin, son of musician Isadore Barbarin, grew up on Urquhart Street, and recounted in an interview that he “could hear bands playing for Monday banquets at that hall.”<sup>7</sup> On one of those nights, he remembers his mother telling him that Buddy Bolden was playing; she worried that, “one day Bolden would ‘blow his brains out’ on the horn... he played too loud.”<sup>8</sup> Other notable musicians who played at the hall include Wooden “Joe” Nicholas, Buddy Petit, Joe “King” Oliver (perhaps now most famous for being Louis Armstrong’s mentor), Sidney Bechet,

<sup>3</sup> (Jacobs, *Benevolent Societies of New Orleans Blacks During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* 1988, 21, 22)

<sup>4</sup> (Jacobs, *Benevolent Societies of New Orleans Blacks During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* 1988, 32-33)

<sup>5</sup> (Lentz 2007), (Blokker 2012)

<sup>6</sup> (Lentz 2007)

<sup>7</sup> (Lentz 2007), (Armagost 2012)

<sup>8</sup> (Lentz 2007), (Armagost 2012)

“Big Eye” Louis Nelson, Chris Kelley, and Sam Morgan.<sup>9</sup>

As modern day insurance companies came into prevalence, the need for mutual aid societies dwindled, and with them, the association halls that cradled the nascence of jazz. The building was sold in 1949, for \$6,000.00, to Reverend Mother Adliade Conrad, of 1544 N. Villere Street, to be the site of the Holy Aid and Comfort Spiritual Church of Eternal Life, a Spiritual congregation, she headed.<sup>10</sup> The building is referred to in Claude F. Jacobs seminal work on the faith, *The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African American Religion*, as being, “probably the most impressive (of the) Spiritual church buildings.”<sup>11</sup> The congregation still owns the building today.



Figure 2. 1644 Villere Street, 1961

<sup>9</sup> (Knollenberg 2017), (Lentz 2007), (In the society pages in the 1910s: Joe 'King' Oliver, Louis Armstrong's mentor 2018)

<sup>10</sup> (The Times-Picayune 1948), (Lentz 2007), (Jacobs 1992), (Attend the Church of Your Choice Sunday 1954), (1940 US Census New Orleans Districts 36-10 1940, 1A)

<sup>11</sup> (Jacobs, *The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African-American Religion* 1992, 30-31)



Figure 5. Plaque and wooden frame at front elevation



Figure 6. Persverance Hall 1644 N. Villere Street, 2007

## Building Description



Figure 7. 1644 N. Villere Street, 2018

The building at 1644 N. Villere Street is a narrow, one-story, rectangular, three bay, wood frame, wood clad structure with a brick pier foundation. The front elevation features a Spanish Mission Revival parapet at the gable. The building is painted a light blue color.

The building formerly had a rear service wing, as shown on the 1893 Sanborn map; the service wing was replaced with a camelback in 1927, which remained extant until

2007, when it was partially demolished. Also added in the 1927 renovation was the front façade, which extended the front elevation up to the sidewalk, and the distinctive Mission style parapet. Stairs lead up to the recessed entryway to doubled leaved doors. Above the doorway, is a large empty molded frame, which extends across the entirety of the façade, formerly a site for signage. Also on the façade, are two center pivot windows, each with four vertical panes of glass; on the left-hand side, the panes are clear glass, on the right, three of the panes are painted red glass, with the other being clear- windows of the same style are found as the first windows on both side elevations. Four over four windows appear on the rest of the building. A circular painted glass window at the parapet, seen in 1940's photos of the building, is now a rectangular gable vent. Under the left window, there is an empty wood framed box with a triangular pediment. At the right of the façade, there is an inset stone plaque.

The rear portion of the building, which formerly supported the camelback,



Figure 8. 1644 N. Villere Street, 2018

appears charred, and is currently open to the elements.

### **Statement of Significance and Staff Recommendation**

The Historic District Landmarks Commission evaluates the significance of a structure based on the four criteria as established by Section 84.22 of the City Code, any one of which can make a building eligible for nomination. The staff finds that the Holy Aid and Comfort Spiritual Church overwhelmingly meets the criteria for cultural significance, which is defined as any building which "Exemplifies or reflects the broad, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community." The building's use has changed through the years, but whether acting as a hall for one of the first benevolent and mutual aid societies in the city, as a place for local musicians to play, or as a neighborhood church, this distinctive structure has been a meeting place for its surrounding community since the 1880's. Based on the cultural and historic merits of the building, the staff recommends nomination of this building for study as a landmark.



**Figure 9. 1644 N. Villere St., Google Maps image, 2018**

## Work Cited

1940. "1940 US Census New Orleans Districts 36-10." National Archives and Records Administration.
- Armagost, Karen. 2012. *Perseverance Society Hall*. Presentation, New Orleans: New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park.
- Blokker, Laura Ewen. 2012. *The African American Experience in Louisiana*. Assessment Document, Baton Rouge: State of Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism Office of Cultural Development Division of Historic Preservation.
2018. "In the society pages in the 1910s: Joe 'King' Oliver, Louis Armstrong's mentor." *nola.com*. April 1. Accessed April 2, 2018.  
[http://www.nola.com/vintage/2018/04/louis\\_armstrongs\\_mentor\\_in\\_the.html](http://www.nola.com/vintage/2018/04/louis_armstrongs_mentor_in_the.html).
- Jacobs, Claude F. 1988. "Benevolent Societies of New Orleans Blacks During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29 (1): 21-33.
- . 1992. *The Spiritual Churches of New Orleans: Origins, Beliefs, and Rituals of an African-American Religion*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee.
- Knollenberg, Emily Z. 2017. *Perserverance Benevolent Mutual Aid Association Hall National Register Nomination*. National Register Nomination, Baton Rouge: State of Louisiana Office of the Lieutenant Governor Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation.
- Lentz, Laureen. 2007. "1644 N. Villere St. Historical Landmark: Perserverance Society Hall." *The Lens*, March 20. <https://thelensnola.org/2007/03/20/1644-n-villere-st-historical-landmark-perserverance-society-hall/>.
- New Orleans Item*. 1954. "Attend the Church of Your Choice Sunday." July 4: 12.
- The Advocate*. 2017. "300 unique New Orleans moments: Perseverance Benevolent and Mutual Aid Association forms in March 1783." August 14.  
[http://www.theadvocate.com/new\\_orleans/entertainment\\_life/tricentennial/article\\_aa4eafc4-4181-11e7-a158-9f60dca0516e.html](http://www.theadvocate.com/new_orleans/entertainment_life/tricentennial/article_aa4eafc4-4181-11e7-a158-9f60dca0516e.html).
- The Times-Picayune*. 1948. November 11: 44.

## Figure Attribution

Cover Image. Author's Own, March 16, 2018.

Figure 1. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, New Orleans, Louisiana, Vol.4, Sheet 134, 1893

Figure 2. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, New Orleans, Louisiana, Vol. 1, Sheet 17, 1937

Figure 3. "Perseverance Benevolent Society, June 1942." Knollenberg, Emily Z. 2017. *Perseverance Benevolent Mutual Aid Association Hall National Register Nomination*. National Register Nomination, Baton Rouge: State of Louisiana Office of the Lieutenant Governor Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation.

Figure 4. "644 Villere Street, New Orleans, September 27, 1961." Hogan Jazz Archive, Special Collections, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library. Tulane University. Assessed April 2, 2018. <https://digitallibrary.tulane.edu/islandora/object/tulane%3A140490>

Figure 5. Lauren Lentz, "Untitled" March 9, 2007. Assessed April 2, 2018. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/neworleans/416058503/in/album-72157594579745912/>

Figure 6. Lauren Lentz, "Untitled" March 9, 2007. Assessed April 2, 2018. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/neworleans/416059158/in/album-72157594579745912/>

Figure 7. Author's Own, March 16, 2018.

Figure 8. Author's Own, March 16, 2018.

Figure 9. Google Maps. Assessed April 3, 2018. <https://www.google.com/maps/place/1644+N+Villere+St,+New+Orleans,+LA+70116/@29.9719722,-90.0633906,127a,35y,183.12h,45t/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x8620a61cfdb76d1f:0x2dc3dc907e20f257!8m2!3d29.9709895!4d-90.063382>